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Intension / Extension in Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922)

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E. E. Constance Jones endorsed a standard late nineteenth-century conception of the extension-intension distinction: “by the extension or denotation of a term I mean the things to which it applies”, whereas “by its intension I mean those properties or qualities of the things which it signifies” (Jones 1911: 12). She makes two observations:

A. Knowledge of the intension of a term does not guarantee that we can identify its extension.

B. Knowledge of the extension of a term does not guarantee knowledge of its intension.

Regarding (A) Jones writes: “I may have full descriptive knowledge” of *X* “and yet not be able to recognise” *X* – “though it may much concern me to do so” (*ibid.*: 13). This is an instance of the puzzle of informative identity (see *Identity / Nonidentity*): although *that figure is a chiliagon* is true, I might be unable to ascertain its truth, even though the figure is indeed thousand-sided and I am fully aware that chiliagons are thousand-sided.

While (B) parallels Russell’s (1905: 487) claim that there is “no backward road” from reference to sense, because every object can be referred to in infinitely many different ways, Jones’s observation is in fact deeper, anticipating insights due to Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke. On Jones’s view, one may be able to distinguish the elements in the extension of a term *T* from those in its complement and yet be incapable of coming up with a feature that all members of *T*’s extension share: “I may know real diamonds from paste [...] and always apply the [term] rightly, and yet be unable to set out even to myself the connotation or intension” (1911: 13). Similarly, Evans argued that the capacity to identify and refer to a given person across various scenarios – which is also the capacity to distinguish that person from others across these scenarios – is distinct from the capacity to cite a description uniquely true of that person.

Jones articulated the distinction between intension and extension already in 1890,

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referring to it as the distinction between determination and denomination (see *Denomination / Determination*).

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Keywords:

intension, extension, identity, determination, denomination, Bertrand Russell, Hilary Putnam, Saul Kripke, Gareth Evans

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